

Message Text

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PAGE 01 KUALA 09819 142030Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8256
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 9819

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MY
SUBJECT: SARAWAK CHIEF MINISTER ANNOUNCES DECISION TO RESIGN

REF: A) KUALA LUMPUR 7501 DTG 240721Z JUL 78, B) KUALA LUMPUR
A-031, 04/11/78

1. SUMMARY. SARAWAK CHIEF MINISTER DATUK PATINGGI
RAHMAN YAAKUB ANNOUNCED SEPT 12 THAT HE WILL SOON RESIGN AS
CHIEF MINISTER. HE DID NOT GIVE A DATE FOR THE RESIGNATION NOR
DID HE SAY WHAT HE WILL DO AFTERWARDS. WE SEE RAHMAN'S IMPENDING
RESIGNATION AS A SIGN OF HIS DISFAVOR IN KUALA LUMPUR FOR
BLATANT ABUSE OF POWER AND CORRUPTION AND CONSEQUENT DECLINING
POLITICAL POPULARITY. THE NEXT SARAWAK CHIEF MINISTER IS LIELY

TO BE TH PRESENT FEDERAL MINISTER OF DEFENSE DATUK AMAR TAIB
MAHMUD. END SUMMARY.

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2. SARAWAK CHIEF MINISTER RAHMAN YAAKUB TOLD REPORTERS SEPT
12 THAT HE WILL SOON RELINQUISH HIS POST AS CHIEF MINISTER. HE
MADE THE ANNOUNCEMENT JUST BEFORE FLYING TO KUALA LUMPUR TO INFORM
PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN OF HIS DECISION. RAHMAN ALSO SAID
THAT HE WILL "CONTINUE TO SERVE THE INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY.,
EITHER IN SARAWAK, KUALA LUMPUR OR EVEN OUTSIDE MALAYSIA," BUT
HE DID NOT INDICATE EITHER WHEN HE WILL STEP DOWN AS CHIEF

MINISTER OR WHAT HE MIGHT BE DOING AFTER HIS RESIGNATION. RAHMAN SAID THAT THE CHOICE OF THE NEW CHIEF MINISTER IS UP TO PM HUSSEIN AND TO THE THREE NATIONAL FRONT (NF) COMPONENT PARTIES IN SARAWAK.

3. THE STORY OF RAHMAN'S RESIGNATION AS CARRIED BY THE GOM NEWS AGENCY BERNAMA WAS RATHER STRAIGHTFORWARD, BUT ACCORDING TO A REPORT IN THE KUALA LUMPUR CHINESE-LANGUAGE NANYANG SIANG PAU, THE PRESS CONFERENCE WAS AN EMOTIONAL AFFAIR IN WHICH RAHMAN ACCUSED "CERTAIN PEOPLE, INCLUDING SOME WITHIN THE NF," OF ATTEMPTING TO UNDERMINE HIS POSITION BY SPREADING UNFOUNDED RUMORS. RAHMAN SHOWED SOME OF THE SAME BITTERNESS WHEN HE MET WITH REPORTERS AFTER HIS ARRIVAL IN KUALA LUMPUR SEPT 13. AFTER DISCUSSING HIS RESIGNATION WITH PM HUSSEIN, RAHMAN WILL GO ON A THREE MONTH HOLIDAY STARTING WITH THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS MEETING IN JAMAICA.

4. EVER SINCE RAHMAN'S NEPHEW AND LONG-TIME POLITICAL ALLY TAIB MAHMUD WAS NAMED MINISTER OF DEFENSE AFTER THE GENERAL ELECTION IT HAS BEEN SPECULATED IN POLITICAL CIRCLES THAT HE AND RAHMAN WOULD SWITCH JOBS AFTER THE SARAWAK STATE ELECTIONS ARE HELD. (THEY WERE NOT HELD WITH THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS LAST JULY AS IN MOST OTHER STATES.) RAHMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS IMPENDING RESIGNATION MAY PRESAGE THE CALLING OF STATE ELECTIONS IN SARAWAK VERY SOON SINCE TAIB IS THE MOST LIKELY SUCCESSOR AND HIS IS NOT AT THE MOMENT A MEMBER OF THE SARAWAK STATE ASSEMBLY, A PRECONDITION FOR BECOMING CHIEF MINISTER. CONFIDENTIAL

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5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE SARAWAK STATE ELECTIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE CALLED SOON, AND TAIB WILL PROBABLY BE THE NEXT CHIEF MINISTER, WE THINK IT LESS LIKELY THAT RAHMAN WILL MOVE TO KL TO TAKE THE DEFENSE PORTFOLIO. THE RECENT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION IN SARAWAK, WITH A MAJOR (THOUGH ULTIMELY UNSUCCESSFUL) CHALLENGE MOUNTED AGAINST THE RAHMAN-LED NF, BROUGHT OUT INTO THE OPEN WIDELY RUMORED CHARGES OF LARGE-SCALE CORRUPTION AGAINST RAHMAN AND HIS CRONIES. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (NBI) HAS BEGUN AN EXAMINATION OF THESE CHARGES AND PM HUSSEIN HAS MADE IT A MAJOR POLICY TO ROOT OUT CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT. ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE THAT RAHMAN COULD BE ALLOWED TO SAVE FACE AND BE MOVED OUT OF SIGHT THROUGH A PRESTIGIOUS DIPLOMATIC POSTING, IT DOES NOT SEEM LIKE HUSSEIN'S STYLE TO GIVE A CABINET PORTFOLIO TO A MAN TAINTED BY CORRUPTION CHARGES, EVEN TO ONE WITH RAHMAN YAAKUB'S WELL-DESERVED REPUTATION FOR ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE.

6. RAHMAN'S IMPENDING RESIGNATION IS ALSO A REFLECTION OF HIS DECLINING POLITICAL POPULARITY IN SARAWAK. ALTHOUGH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES AND FACTIONS WHICH CHALLENGED THE NF IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION IN JULY WERE NOT SUCCESSFUL, THEY ARE LIKELY TO MAKE A

GREATER EFFORT IN A STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTION WHEN THERE IS A
CHANCE TO
TOPPLE THE STATE GOVERNMENT AND GAIN CONTROL OF THE PATRONAGE
SO IMPORTANT TO SARAWAK POLITICS. ALTHOUGH RAHMAN IS A SKILLED
POLITICIAN, POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO THE NF IN SARAWAK HAS
FOCUSSED ON HIS PERSONAL CORRUPTION, HIGH-HANDEDNESS AND NEPOTISM,
AND THE DEPARTURE OF RAHMAN AS CHIEF MINISTER HAS BEEN A MAJOR
GOAL OF THE OPPOSITION. WITH RAHMAN REMOVED
AS AN OPPOSITION TARGET, NF PROSPECTS IN THE COMING STATE
ELECTION LOOK BRIGHTER.
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